

Testimony of GENEVIEVE PORTER EASON
Vice Chairman, Wilton Youth Council
Board of Directors, Southwest Regional Mental Health Board

**H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

*February 23, 2017 Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services
Regional Action Council and Regional Mental Health Board Funding*

Dear: Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Senator Markley, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Genevieve Porter Eason, and I am a resident of Wilton, CT. I serve on the board of Wilton Youth Council, our Local Prevention Council, as well as on the Board of Directors and one of the Catchment Area Councils of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board. I write to you today to strongly oppose the consolidations of the Regional Action Councils and Regional Mental Health Boards. With the mental health system in Connecticut already shrinking, cutting these effective prevention agencies would be detrimental to Connecticut residents.

Wilton Youth Council is supported by the Mid-Fairfield Substance Abuse Coalition (MFSAC), a program of the Human Services Council, which is the Regional Action Council for our area. Wilton Youth Council is an all-volunteer non-profit organization that relies on donations, grants and collaboration with community partners to offer programs for youth, parents and our community. Financial support from MFSAC allows us to offer professionally run substance use prevention and youth leadership programs to students in our town. Additionally, the director of MFSAC regularly attends our board and parent education committee meetings, where she is an invaluable resource to us. She brings information about state initiatives that we would not otherwise be aware of, such as the new prescription disposal bags that are available at local pharmacies in Connecticut at no charge to consumers. She connects us with resources in our region and across the state. And she shares her wealth of knowledge and experience. Next month she will be joining a panel discussion we are organizing to educate parents about the risks of e-cigarette use and binge drinking by adolescents. Our programs serve students, parents and our community and have been enormously successful in reducing substance use over the almost 30 years that we have been in existence. MFSAC is an important contributor to the work we do.

The Southwest Regional Mental Health Board (SWRMHB) is equally important. The Regional Mental Health Boards are uniquely positioned to provide valuable services to our community. SWRMHB serves as an important hub for disseminating information within the mental health community in Fairfield County. Though the Catchment Area Councils providers have the opportunity to network, and consumers can access a wide array of resources. Information on programs, services and events are shared

countywide. This access to information and collaboration is invaluable as providers attempt to care for the mentally ill and their families with increasingly limited resources. The Catchment Area Councils also provide a forum for consumers and providers to jointly mobilize on major initiatives. Two current examples are HB6887, which is before the Insurance Committee and would provide insurance coverage (both public and private) for mental health peer support services and case management, and HB6483, which is before the Public Health Committee and would establish a state task force to make specific recommendations to deal with shortages in the behavioral health workforce. Both of those bills came directly from needs assessments conducted by the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board.

The current proposal to consolidate the Regional Action Councils and Regional Mental Health Boards is penny wise and pound foolish. These organizations already operate on a shoe string budget. Yet the Regional Action Councils together procure over \$11 million in federal, private and local funding and more than \$850,000 in in-kind donations each year. The Regional Action Councils and Regional Mental Health Boards produce regional assessments of mental health and addiction services used in the state application for federal funding of \$23 million. How will the state secure those federal funds without these organizations' support?

The proposed consolidation of the Regional Action Councils and Regional Mental Health Boards amounts to the effective elimination of these important resources. There are no other organizations filling this role. Please ensure that these crucial organizations continue to serve the residents of Connecticut.

Thank you for your support of people with mental health and/or substance use disorders. Given that one in four Americans will experience a mental illness in their lifetime, these are issues that affect each one of us.

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